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The Idylls of the King and the Arthurian Legend

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THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

AND

THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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Vita Auctoris

Daniel Patrick O'Donohue was born at Chicago, Illinois, September 9, 1907. He received his elementary education at St. Agatha's school, Chicago, Ill. He attended St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, Illinois, and St. Joseph's College, Kirkwood, Missouri, graduating in June, 1929. In September, 1930 he entered the Jesuit Novitiate of the Sacred Heart, Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences of Xavier University, Cincinnati, graduating in August 1933 with the degree of Bachelor of Literature. In September 1933 he began his graduate studies in the Department of English at St. Louis University. He transferred to the Department of English at Loyola University, Chicago, in September 1934.

"The Idylls of the King" AND THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

"The Idylls of the King" are undoubtedly one of the finest poetic achievements of the Victorian era, and through the "Idylls" the Arthurian legend has regained its old-time popularity. The student at the first reading will be struck by the apparent Catholicity of the "Idylls," but a careful study proves the opposite to be the actual truth, for Tennyson has altered the Arthurian legend to suit the Protestant views of his day. Tennyson used Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" as his main, it might be said, his sole source, yet he failed to retain the religious spirit of the Arthurian legend. The problem of this thesis is to show that the "Idylls" are not an authentic interpretation of the Arthurian legend in as much as Tennyson failed to reproduce the religious spirit of the original, a religious spirit which is an essential part of the Arthurian legend. Tennyson is Victorian, the crowning glory of the Victorian age; his outstanding work as a Victorian is the "Idylls," and the "Idylls" are a failure precisely because Tennyson's literary outlook was too narrowly Victorian.

CHAPTER ONE

"THE MORTE D'ARTHUR," A SYNTHESIS OF MEDIEVAL CIVILIZATION

This chapter is a discussion of Tennyson's source, "The Morte D'Arthur," in relation to the philosophic and religious background of the Middle Ages, to substantiate the statement that Malory has caught accurately the religious spirit of medievalism and that the "Morte D'Arthur" is a synthesis of medieval civilization. The "Morte D'Arthur" is a delineation of early English faith and pious beliefs; its composition is medieval and represents the tone of thought common to those days.

THE LIFE OF THE MIDDLE AGES The people of the age represented in the "Morte D'Arthur" were not so hopeless, so enthralled with worldliness, so uncertain in their knowledge of the things of the soul, so weakly inclining to the vice of sensualism as Tennyson made them appear. They were passionate, sinful, fierce, it is true, for they had the excessive faults of a masterful race; but they were fiercely passionate, too, in their devotion to Christ, repentance followed quickly on the heels of their misdeeds, and they were clothed round about with the awful splendor of the supernatural, to which they paid unquestioning homage. In the Middle Ages, however difficult the individual might find the observance of the moral law, he was

always certain and conscious of its existence, and recognized the need of atoning for any infringement of that law. To the mass of people of that time this life was a testing-ground prepared as a place for man's trial and probation.¹

MEDIEVAL MYSTICISM AND ASCETICISM

Just what is this mysticism and asceticism of the medieval era and the "Morte

D'Arthur"? This mysticism and asceticism is, in a few words, the religion of the Catholic Church. The religion of Catholicism at its highest, the religion of the great ascetics who have been the wonder or despair of future generations, was altogether dependent on one fact, the certainty of the presence of God, and the direct consciousness of sin intensified by the presence of God. Asceticism is not an endeavor to appease God by self-inflicted and excruciating sufferings, not an attempt to obtain honor and credit with God by voluntary endurance of pain. The awful majesty and purity of God, the littleness and utter sinfulness of men, the ever present consciousness of their Maker and Judge, formed the motive power of ascetical and mystical religion. The ascetic of the Middle Ages who sought the unveiled Vision must be pure of heart; he must possess a purity of heart which meant complete repudiation of all sensual joys.

"Indeed the Middle Ages cannot be appraised rightly, while mysticism remains foreign to the mind, for most medieval books are tinctured with it. They reflect a Catholic civilization, and Catholicism is mystical to its very fiber." 2

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

The Middle Ages possessed the greatest
intellects since the days of Aristotle,

they have to their honor St. Thomas Aquinas,
Albert the Great, Bonaventure and many others, men whose philo-
sophic tenets have molded the mind of the Middle Ages. Medie-
val philosophy and ethics were systematically intellectual and
all the philosophical and ethical treatises helped to serve the
Sacrament of Penance, and in this way medieval philosophy was
an aid to medieval religion. 3

On the religion of the Middle Ages little need be said,
as it is a patent fact that the only religion of those days was
the orthodox religion of the Catholic Church. The religious be-
lief of the people was not a sentimental sort of belief, it was
deeply intellectual because of its close affinity to scholas-
ticism. It demanded the acceptance of a clean cut body of dogma
and required the observance of all the commandments and laws of
God and His Holy Church.

MIDDLE AGES INTERESTED IN THE INDIVIDUAL, NOT NATIONAL SALVATION

Concerning the quest for salvation, Malory,
as did the Middle Ages, maintained a view com-
pletely alien to that of Tennyson and the Vic-

torians. As is taught by the Church in our own
day, The Middle Ages believed that the individual must first
strive for his eternal salvation, and, by doing so, the better
to serve his neighbor, his country, and his God.

"The achievement of earthly good, of national holiness, slipped beyond the horizon; the central and supreme aim became the mystic union of the individual with God, possible only when the spirit was divorced from interest in the things of sense. The social, the national hope dropped out of the quest altogether, as it had dropped like a Utopia from the Christian dream; and while faint suggestions of the broader early thought pervade the story (sc. of Malory) interest in the Grail-books center at last exclusively in the salvation of the individual and his progress along the Mystic Way."⁴

THE KNIGHTS To the Middle Ages eternal life was a fact as
 ON
 THE QUEST real as human existence; to the medieval knight
 the search after the Grail might culminate in earthly disaster but it always meant the attainment of eternal riches. Whatever might have been the shortcomings of Arthur's knights in Malory's work, they one and all evinced a lively faith, and a profound veneration for holy things, and a truly Catholic desire for reconciliation with God through the reception of the sacraments whenever they fell into serious sin. The knights were in reality pilgrims and in the spirit of pious pilgrims they sought the Holy Grail. The knights were pilgrims in transparent disguise, and their adventures can best be understood as phases of the Mystic Way, i.e., The Way of Purgation or life of penance, The Way of Illumination, or the study and imitation of the life of Christ the perfect Exemplar, The Way of Unity, or love for the Risen Christ and a desire to be united with their glorified Saviour. To the knights the spiritual world was the only real world, the eternal world revealed itself through the material. And even though the quest along

the Mystic Way means the frustration of worldly hopes and ambitions, the knights knew that one day there would be given to them the revelation of the glory of God.

Although the knights of Malory's story were in quest of personal holiness, the spiritual salvation of the individual, nevertheless failure to achieve personal sanctification always reacted to the detriment of the national life. This close connection of the nation's well-being with the personal holiness of its citizens is foreign to the modern idea of state-craft which looks to a complete separation of Church and State.

Medieval rulers recognized the dependence of the national life on the people's belief in the one, true faith. The medieval ruler openly protected the Church, and the secular arm frequently had recourse to armed force to crush heresy and unbelief. The citizen of the medieval state who was not a good Christian could never be a loyal faithful subject. Hence we see why Malory's work insisted so much on personal sanctification.

"But the stern recognition that failure in the quest for holiness means ultimate national disgrace is no less true and Malory's version knows it." 5

THE MASS AND THE GRAIL QUEST The Mass in Malory's and in the earlier versions of the Arthurian legend plays an important part in the quest. Malory makes constant references to the efforts of the knights to attend Mass before starting out on their daily adventures for the Grail. Malory makes much

of the Mass and rightly so, for the purpose of his story is to open men's eyes that they may behold the whole world sub specie sacramenti. To the knights the whole world and the universe were forever chanting Holy, Holy, Holy. "The soul of romance in the Christian mystery consists in what may not be fully known, and the Sancgraal, 'which is the secret of Our Lord Jesus Christ,' is the ultimate symbol which may well abide in the central sanctuary of romantic art." 6

In Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" the scene where Lancelot achieves partial success in his quest is centered about the Mass.

"And bifore the holy vessel he sawe a good man clothed as a preest/ And it semed that he was at the sacrynge of the masse/ And it semed to Launcelot that aboute the preestes handes were thre men wherof the two putte the yongest by lykenes bitwene the preestes handes/ and soo he lyfte hit vp ryght hyhe/ & and it semed to shewe so to the peple/ And thenne Launcelot merueyled not a lytyl/ For hym thouzt the preest was so gretely charged of the fygure that hym semed that he shold falle to the erthe/ And whan he sawe none aboute hym that wolde helpe hym/ Thenne came he to the dore a grete paas and sayd/ Faire Fader Ihesu Cryst ne take hit for no synne though I helpe the good man whiche hath grete nede of help/ Ryghte so entryed he in to the chamber and cam toward the table of syluer/ and whanne he came nyghe he felte a brethe that hym thoughte hit was entremedled with fyre whiche smote hym so sore in the vysage that hym thoughte it brente his vysage/ and therewith he felle to the erthe and had no power to aryse/ as he that soo araged that had loste the power of his body and his herynge and his seynge/" 7

REPENTANCE
AND THE
GRAIL QUEST

The idea of penitence and spiritual victory over sin is clearly evident in Malory's treatment of the Arthurian legend. Emphatically is this true

of the final chapter of the "Morte D'Arthur." It is no last-minute conversion and repentance that shows Lancelot in the priest's habit at the end, ⁸ the priestly heart was in him always; it conquers at the end. No grief need be spent over him as he ends his days in the hermitage by Arthur's tomb, for Lancelot and the few surviving knights are exceedingly at peace through a great repentance.

"Romance is the offspring of Christianity and Christianity knows that to a sinful race there is one life only which ensures the freedom of the sons of God. It is the life of Penitence, therefore on the note of hope the Arthuriad concludes." ⁹

THE "MORTE D'ARTHUR"
A SYNTHESIS OF MEDIEVAL CIVILIZATION

The "Morte D'Arthur" represents the Catholic religion as an integral part of medieval life. The entire book is built around the problem of spiritual salvation. Medieval mysticism and asceticism lead rationally to a complete repentance and union with God. This life of penance and union with God was guided by right reason and drew men away from sensuality. It is this life of personal sanctification through penance which Malory shows us in his "Morte D'Arthur." And in as much as the "Morte D'Arthur" shows us how spiritual victory was finally gained, it is a true portrayal of medieval civilization.

"Malory's task was to tell of the rise and fall of chivalry, and chivalry, according to him, was built upon three loyalties - loyalty to the king, loyalty to the lady, and loyalty to God. It was upon these three points that Malory built a story which synthesises the whole medieval civilization." ¹⁰

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

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2. Tatlock, J.S.P., "The Middle Ages, Romantic or Rational-
istic?" Speculum, VIII (1933), p.301
3. ibid., p.303
4. Scudder, Vida D., Le Morte D'Arthur of Sir Thomas Malory
and Its Sources (New York, 1917), p.278
5. ibid., p.407
6. ibid., p.306
7. Malory, Sir Thomas, Morte D'Arthur, BK. XVII, chap. 15
8. ibid., Bk. XXI, chap. 9 and ff.
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10. Morgan, Sister Mary, Galahad in English Literature, (Cath.
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CHAPTER TWO

TENNYSON A PRODUCT OF HIS AGE

All great writers are in a real sense the products of the age of which they are the children; their work is modified and their range is limited by the sentiments and opinions prevalent in their times. It has been pointed out in the previous chapter how Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" was affected by his times; this chapter will show how Tennyson in writing the "Idylls" was influenced by his age. Tennyson set forth as a poet with a religious bias, the religious bias of the Victorian period, which he wove into the "Idylls." His religion was affected by the philosophy of his day. Tennyson's day was an era when the philosophies of Kant and Hegel exerted a wide influence. It was an age of active questioning and doubt, and, in a large measure, of positive denial. Science, materialism and evolution made belief in God difficult.

It is as a representative of a period of religious speculation that Tennyson gives us his version of the Arthurian story. As a child of his age he applied his marvelous poetical faculty to the problems and struggles which were characteristic of his spiritual environment. He did not escape from the influence of his surroundings; Tennyson's Arthur and the knights of the Round Table are concerned with the problems and difficulties and ideals of the nineteenth century. It is pre-

cisely this placing of the Arthurian romance of the Middle Ages into a nineteenth century setting which proves to be the greatest fault of the "Idylls."

Tennyson could not give us a true version of the Arthurian romance, for his outlook was too modern. The poet's modern outlook on the Arthurian story can be traced to the following influences: to his college days at Cambridge, to the religious views of his friend Frederick Maurice and to Maurice's Broad Church movement within the Established Church, and to Tennyson's belief in scientific evolution. Moreover the poet looked with disfavor on the asceticism and the celibate and monastic life of the Catholic Church, and openly subjected this asceticism to ridicule. Surely a poet who could not countenance the asceticism of Arthur's knights, nor of the priests and monks of the Arthurian legend, was not fitted to give an authentic and sympathetic rendering of the old legend.

THE "SOCIETY OF APOSTLES" AT CAMBRIDGE IN TENNYSON'S SCHOOL DAYS

Tennyson's modern and liberal doctrines took their origin from his early days at Cambridge. Previous to this time we know very little of his views; but we have some information about the "Society of Apostles," which Maurice and Tennyson organized in their student days. Maurice, Tennyson and their fellows held disputations on politics, philosophy and religion, and based all their discussions on the most radical philosophers of the day. Tennyson's "Memoirs" present us with some definite infor-

mation about the "Apostles."

"Arthur Hallam, in a letter to Gladstone, says of Frederick Maurice; The effect which he had produced on the minds of many at Cambridge by the single creation of that "Society of Apostles" is far greater than I can dare to calculate, and will be felt, both directly and indirectly, in the age that is upon us." ¹

The members of the "Apostles" not only debated on politics but read their Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Bentham, Descartes and Kant, and discussed such questions as the origin of evil, prayer and the personality of God. Some of the questions discussed by the "Society of Apostles" were: Have Shelley's poems an immoral tendency? Is an intelligible first cause deducible from the phenomena of the Universe? To both of these questions Tennyson voted, No! ² Surely one who denied that a first cause could be deduced from the phenomena of the universe was not to be trusted and relied upon in interpreting a medieval Catholic legend.

TENNYSON'S SCIENTIFIC BELIEF IN EVOLUTION Tennyson was deeply interested in the scientific theory of evolution. He believed every man to be the "heir of all ages in the foremost files of time." ³ "Many a million ages have gone to the making of a man." ⁴ Tennyson's belief in evolution can be traced back to his scientific interests. He was greatly interested in the theory of organic evolution and especially in the Darwinian explanation of evolution. ⁵

"Scientific leaders like Herschel, Owen, Sedgwick, Tyndall regarded him as the champion of science and

cheered him with words of genuine admiration for his love of nature, for his eagerness with which he welcomed all the latest scientific discoveries, and for his trust in truth. Science indeed in his opinion was one of the main forces tending to disperse the superstition that still darkens the world." 6

A Catholic poet in our day could perhaps believe in the latest theory on evolution and, at the same time, give us a Catholic interpretation of the Arthurian legend. But in Tennyson's day evolution of the human species meant the origin of life from non-life without the creative powers of Almighty God. Therefore we may say that a view such as Tennyson's made it impossible for him to give us an adequate and true interpretation of the Arthurian romance.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TENNYSON It has been explained in the previous chapter that the philosophy of the "Morte D'Arthur" and the Middle Ages was the scholasticism of Aquinas. Keeping this fact in mind for comparison we can briefly determine what philosophies affected Tennyson and his "Idylls." In the "Society of Apostles" at Cambridge, as it has already been mentioned, "the members read their Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Bentham, Descartes and Kant." 7 We are further informed that soon after his marriage Tennyson took to reading different systems of philosophy, and that Spinoza, Berkeley, Kant, Schlegel, Fichte, Hegel and Ferrier were among the books added to his library. 8 And nowhere in this collection is there to be found a work on scholasticism, despite the fact that a poet should have at least a faint knowledge of the mind and phil-

osophy of the Middle Ages before writing a great poem on the medieval Arthurian legend.

From Tennyson's own words it is evident that he had leanings towards Kantianism. The following quotation, though it has reference to another matter, establishes the point that Tennyson's philosophy, if we are to honor him with the title of philosopher, was entirely modern. "But what need you my praise, when you have secured approval of him who is by report our greatest Hegelian, whereas I, though I have a gleam of Kant, have never turned a page of Hegel." ⁹ Masterman calls Tennyson a Kantian idealist; "To Tennyson the whole material universe was but a picture or vision in the mind of beings possessing organization similiar to one's own." ¹⁰

THE INFLUENCE OF MAURICE AND OTHERS ON THE RELIGION OF TENNYSON

To understand Tennyson's mind more fully it is necessary to consider the men who exerted the greatest religious influence on the poet. Tennyson was in hearty sympathy with such men as Frederick Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley, who were trying to make religion more liberal by their emphasis on the obligations of brotherhood. Frederick Maurice was an intimate friend of the poet and Tennyson honored him as an able and courageous minister of the Church. The poet rated Maurice "as the foremost thinker among the Churchmen of the time." ¹¹ Hallam Tennyson further informs us, "two ideas which Maurice expressed my father would quote with approbation, that the real Hell was the

absence of God from the human soul and that all religions seemed to him to be imperfect manifestations of Christianity." 12 These two ideas exerted the most influence on the poet's religion. These main doctrines of Maurice were mere assertions concerning the relation of God to man and "the universe, and were backed by no proof "for these doctrines of Maurice could not be proved, and it is these doctrines that lay at the root of the religion we find in Tennyson's poetry, and influenced that poetry from 1830 to 1892." 13

TENNYSON'S RELIGION One of Maurice's tenets, as has already been mentioned, was that all religions seemed to be imperfect manifestations of Christianity. Tennyson, despite the fact that he belonged to the Established Church, prided himself on his freedom from the dogmatism of sects. His religion was based on what appealed to him, it was of the eclectic and emotional type. He added to his religion whatever was most attractive in science and tradition, without deeply inquiring whether the elements could be reconciled, or rather satisfied that they were somehow already reconciled in the medium of his own pure and liberal feeling, his religious and ethical instinct.

" 'It is impossible,' he said, 'that the Almighty when you come before Him in the next life, will ask you what your particular form of creed was: but the question will rather be, Have you been true to yourself, and given in my name a cup of cold water to one of these little ones?' " 14

Tennyson's religion, the result of his Kantian philosophy, was based on faith not reason. He has said, "Whatever is the object of faith cannot be the object of reason. In fine, faith must be our guide,- that faith which we believe comes to us from a Divine source." ¹⁵ A Catholic poet could not hold such a view, for the Catholic Church teaches that the objects of faith are never contrary to reason but are rather aided by reason. Tennyson regarded God, in His essential being and nature, as unknowable. "Thou canst not prove the Nameless." ¹⁶ He contended for a creed as broad as possible, and which expresses itself in deeds of love and service rather than in narrow dogma. "All religions seemed to him to be imperfect manifestations of the true Christianity." ¹⁷ Tennyson had no express creed, for he would not formulate his creed, "as people would not understand him if he did," but he considered his poems as expressing the principles at the foundation of his faith. ¹⁸

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds." ¹⁹

TENNYSON'S BELIEF IN PANTHEISM There was one definite form of religion towards which Tennyson had some leanings, it was a sort of idealistic -Pantheism. Since, as we have seen, he did not anchor himself to any definite form of creed, it is not strange nor surprising to find this tinge of pantheism in him and in the "Idylls."

"A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of the individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seemed no extinction but the only true life." 20

The "Idylls" furnish us with further evidence of this pantheism when Tennyson places similiar thoughts in the lines spoken by Arthur:

"Let visions of the night or of the day
Come as they will; and many a time they come,
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
The light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
The air that smites his forehead is not air,
But vision - yea, his very hand and foot." 21

One day while entertaining guests at his country estate Tennyson is quoted as saying, "Time is nothing, are we not all part of Deity?" "Pantheism," hinted Barnes, who was not at ease in this sort of conversation and speculation. "Well," says Tennyson, "I think I believe in Pantheism of a sort." 22

SOME PARTICULAR POINTS IN TENNY- SON'S RELIGION

It is necessary to consider the poet's religious beliefs on certain particular points, points which are intimately connected with the Arthurian story of Malory and his predecessors. Tennyson departs widely from the Catholic beliefs of Malory's day, and it is due to this departure that the religious spirit of the "Idylls" is so divergent from the essential religious character

of Malory's "Morte D'Arthur." The main points of departure in Tennyson's religion are; his conception of God, of sin and Hell, his abhorrence of medieval asceticism and mysticism, of vows and celibacy, of monks and priests of the Catholic Church. Remembering all these points, it is not difficult to understand why Tennyson so radically transformed the religious element of the old Arthurian legend.

ON GOD Tennyson's belief in God was a belief in the Nameless and rested on faith alone. He directed his prayers not to a form of God or man but rather to a supreme Being, known as the Nameless. 23

"Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove." 24

ON SIN AND HELL The other teaching of Frederick Maurice, which influenced Tennyson, was Maurice's denial of hell and eternal punishment for sin. To Tennyson's mind sin meant disorder, a violation of the law, not simply the law imposed from without, but, as it were, from a deity existing within man's nature. Tennyson considered man's sin to be as much against himself as against God. The consciousness of sin as alienating us from God never seems to have entered his view. Sin to him always meant a violation of an inherent law, or duty; but the idea of sin as an evil committed against God, as something that must be atoned for by inevitable expiation, he never experienced.

This failure to realize the truth of eternal punishment for sin, and his inadequate conception of sin, caused Tennyson to develop a fierce opposition to the doctrine of eternal punishment. ²⁵ The following lines place before us a more accurate and vivid picture of the poet's mind on the matter.

"Hell? If the souls of men were immortal,
 The lecher would cleave to his lust, and
 the miser would yearn for his gold,
 And so there were Hell forever! But were
 there a God as you say,
 His love would have power over Hell till
 it utterly vanished away.
 But the God of love, and of Hell together-
 They cannot be thought,
 If there be such a God, may the great God
 curse him and bring him to nought." ²⁶

Another confirmation of Tennyson's denial of Hell is from his "Memoirs."

"One day towards the end of his life he bade me look into the revised Version and see how the revisers had translated the passage, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.' His disappointment was keen when he found the translators had not altered 'everlasting' into Aeonian or some such word: for he would not believe that Christ could preach everlasting punishment." ²⁷

TENNYSON'S Tennyson deliberately wove into his version of
 HATRED OF
 ASCETICISM the Arthurian legend the allegory that ascetic re-

ligion and retreat into cloistered seclusion are entirely evil. In this modern recasting of the legend the symbolism of the tale is wheeled right-around by the poet. The search for the Holy Grail is a mistake. The true life is to bring heaven to earth for others; the untrue to seek apart from earth a heaven for oneself. This self-seeking according to

Tennyson has a swift reaction from asceticism to the sensualism which gains full sway in the downfall of the knights of the Round Table.

"Tennyson deliberately sets himself to make an allegory, the meaning of which shall be - that ascetic religion, an exciting pursuit of signs and wonders, severance from home and the common love of man and woman, and a retreat from the daily work of the world into cloistered seclusion or in pursuit of a supernatural spiritualism, are, save for a few exceptional characters, entirely evil. These things dissolve societies, injure human life, and produce the very evils they are designed to overcome. The opposite life to that, the life of Arthur, is the right life." 28

Masterman has this to say about Tennyson's dislike for the asceticism of the earlier Arthurian legends. "Tennyson failed to appreciate spiritual and ascetic religion because of his inability to discern the glory of effort after ideals from their nature unattainable. . . . This may be wisdom, the wisdom of the world; it is not the teaching of a religion, whose lesson is that heavenly success is attainable only through earthly defeat, and whose founder in His life exhibited apparently the most tremendous failure of all time. Here, at least, the ideal must be the highest; and so long as this is strenuously maintained, so long as the Quest for the Holy Grail is continued, even if the vision is never seen, and the old order breaks up and the whole Round Table is dissolved, yet in the maintenance of the Quest itself the eternal triumph is assured." 29

TEENYSON'S The vow of celibacy, so dear to the heart of the
VIEWS ON
CELIBACY Church, so necessary for the perfect follower of the
evangelical counsels, is impossible and contrary to human

nature according to Tennyson's mind. In the "Idylls" Vivien and Mark laugh at the vows of chastity,³⁰ Queen Guinevere declares it to be madness,³¹ Gawain openly adopts unchastity with Ettarre,³² and Tristram becomes an advocate of free-love.³³

Tennyson's principal reason for ~~condemning~~ asceticism seems to be the fact that asceticism is so intimately connected with and dependent upon the celibate ideal. "Tennyson, like his friend and contemporary poet, Charles Kingsley, had experienced a perfect marriage; both, consequently, were totally unable to appreciate the strength of the celibate ideal." ³⁴

HIS HATE OF **MONKS, FRIARS, PRIESTS, THE CHURCH, ETC.** Tennyson's hatred of monkery
drove him further in this direction.

His portraits of priests, friars and monks are not very inspiring, and differ widely from the religious men we read of in Malory's story. Church officials and members of religious orders are pictured in a very unflattering manner in the historical plays, and in his other poems.

The following lines are typical of Tennyson's treatment of Church officials and the monastic orders. He speaks of the time

"When the monk was fat,
And, issuing shorn and sleek,
Would twist his girdle tight, and pat
The girls upon the cheek." ³⁵

"The mitre-sanctioned harlot draws his clerks
Into the suburb -- their hard celibacy
Sworn to the veriest ice of pureness, molten
Into adulterous living, or such crimes
As holy Paul - a shame to speak to them

Among the heathen --

Sanctuary granted
To bandit, thief, assassin - yea to him
Who hacks his mother's throat - denied to him
Who finds his Saviour in his mother-tongue." 36

"(I) 'railed' at all the Popes, that ever since
Sylvester shed the venom of world wealth
Into the Church, had only proven themselves
Poisoners, Murderers." 37

"She seethed with such adulteries, and the lives
Of many among your churchmen were so foul
That heaven wept and earth blushed." 38

Archbishop Cranmer inveighs

"Against the huge corruptions of the Church,
Monsters of mistradition." 39

In the historical play "Harold" the dying King Edward says:

"Your priests,
Gross, worldly, simoniacal, unlearned." 40

Thomas a-Beckett declares that "Rome is venal even unto rottenness." 41 In the same play "Becket" Walpter Map has this to say about the Papacy; "If you boxed the Pope's ears with a purse, you might stagger him, but he would pocket the purse." 42

Robin Hood speaks in condemnation of the friars;

"One of you
Shamed a too trustful widow whom you heard
In her confession, and another worse,
An innocent maid." 43

These quotations offer sufficient evidence that Tennyson held in disfavor the medieval Catholic Church. How could a poet imbued with such waped views of the Church ever hope to interpret the medieval Arthurian legend for the nineteenth century. The many changes which we find in the "Idylls" were

the inevitable result of the poet's failure to appreciate the Church and the Catholic background of the old legend.

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21. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Holy Grail, line 906
22. Tennyson, Hallam, op. cit., p.878
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24. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem In Memoriam, line 1
25. Masterman, C.F.G., op. cit., p.202
26. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Despair, line 99
27. Tennyson, Hallam, op. cit., p.270
28. Brooke, Stopford, op. cit., p.174
29. Masterman, C.F.G., op. cit., p.179
30. Alfred Tennyson, Poem Merlin and Vivien, line 35
31. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Holy Grail, line 357
32. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Pelleas and Ettarre, line 425
33. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Last Tournament, line 275
34. Masterman, C.F.G., op. cit., p. 165
35. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Talking Oak, line 41
36. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem John Oldcastle, line 101
37. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem John Oldcastle, line 158
38. Tennyson, Alfred, Queen Mary, act III, scene 4
39. ibid., act IV, scene 2.
40. Tennyson, Alfred, Harold, act I, scene 1
41. Tennyson, Alfred, Becket, act I, scene 3
42. ibid., act II, scene 2.
43. Tennyson, Alfred, Foresters, act III, scene 1

CHAPTER III

SPECIFIC REASONS WHY THE "IDYLLS" ARE A FAILURE

Tennyson's version of the Arthurian legend is not the true one, and though he has the distinction of being a faultless artist, he has been too true to the age in which he lived to mirror authentically the true medieval picture. The "Idylls" in parts have intimations of being more pagan than Christian, there are to be found in the poems traces of that pagan spirit of doubt so prevalent in the nineteenth century.

"This fire of heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again
And beat the cross to earth, and break the King
And all his table." ¹

Could the Holy Grail be that heavenly fire, the old sun-worship, of which Vivien prophesied? This plainly is the only meaning that can be attributed to those lines. ² In giving the Grail this meaning Tennyson was faithful to the age in which he lived, and to those for whom he wrote, and to that extent the "Idylls" fail. Where in Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" or the other early Arthurian writers is there to be found such an interpretation of the Grail? To the knights of Malory's story the pursuit of the Grail signified just one thing, it meant the attainment of salvation through penance and union with God.

Despite the fact that the "Idylls of the King" are the finest modern work on the Arthurian legend, the truth remains that the poem is nothing more than a manifestation of the

victorian spirit. Many factors contribute to the failure of the "Idylls" as an Arthurian work; first of all Tennyson was limited to few sources; moreover, the poet, like his environment, lacked all appreciation of the medieval ages and medieval traditions; he was restricted by his insular nationalism and modern views; finally the "Idylls" have failed in their allegory and as an epic.

TENNYSON'S FEW
SOURCES; NOT
AN ARTHURIAN
STUDENT

The main sources on which Tennyson drew for his "Idylls" are Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" and

Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the "Mabinogion," but he transformed the old legend to suit his modern ideas and the spirit of modern thought and ethics. ³ The copy of Malory's work, on which the poem for the greater part is based, was a cheap pocket edition published in 1816 by Walker & Edwards of London. ⁴ Surely this single source is not sufficient to honor the poet as an outstanding Arthurian scholar.

"Tennyson was never a very deep Arthurian student. A little cheap copy of Malory was his companion. He does not appear to have gone deeply into the French and German literature on the subject. Malory's compilation with the "Mabinogion" of Lady Charlotte Guest sufficed for him as materials." ⁵

Malory, on the other hand, gathered his materials from England and the continent, and from popular tradition, in a day when manuscripts were almost the only sources as printing was still uncommon. As a proof of Malory's scholarly research we have only to look up H. O. Sommer's edition of Malory's "Morte D'Arthur." In the third volume of this work there are published all the

known sources which Malory made use of. ⁶ Since therefore we know how scanty Tennyson's sources were in writing the "Idylls," it is not difficult to reject the poet's claim of being an Arthurian student.

THE POET DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE SPIRIT NOR THE ASCETICISM OF THE MIDDLE AGES To Tennyson the Middle Ages seemed as a dead era, they were unintelligible to the mind of the Victorian poet, so enmeshed in the false philosophy and religion of the nineteenth century. His presentation of the medieval Arthurian legend had to be as progressive as his times, there should be no harking back to the spirit that dominated those primitive centuries.

"He thought that nothing new was said, or else
Something so said 'twas nothing- that a truth
Looks freshest in the fashion of the day:
Why take the style of those heroic times?
For nature brings not back the Mastodon,
Nor we those times. " ⁷

It was Tennyson's inability to fully comprehend the Middle Ages which brought about the failure of the "Idylls." ⁸ Arthur's ideal knight, "who revered his conscience as his king," ⁹ would be strange to Malory's day. In those earlier centuries men were often guilty of base acts, but predominant over all their noble or base deeds the knights of the Middle Ages were haunted by the realization of God's searching eye, and not by a sense of conscience, revered "as their king."

The author of the "Idylls" could not grasp these motives underlying the spirituality of the medieval era. Hence his

distaste for all the ascetical and penitential customs of those days. The poet inculcated into the "Idylls" his allegory that gross sensualism resulted from the asceticism and mysticism of the Middle Ages. The following quotations are a corroboration of this:

"In the Idylls there is an unfolding of Tennyson's clearest teaching of the evil effects of the ascetic conception of the object of life. The search for the Holy Grail combined with an outbreak of sensuality, its natural consequence to destroy the great cause, and to ensure the final destruction of Arthur's kingdom, and the fellowship of the Round Table." 10

"The search for the Holy Grail by the knights of the Round Table degenerated into asceticism and a religion of sense." 11

Tennyson insisted upon the selfishness of medieval asceticism and emphasized its more grotesque forms, and in doing this he misrepresented it. The reason for this antipathy to the ascetical quest may be due to the fact that the sceptical age in which Tennyson lived could see nothing but failure in such a quest; this modern view answers to a desire of the poet and his times for a religion that would materially prosper both the nation and the individual. Tennyson held the theory that for the individual to seek the Holy Grail was sheer selfishness; the poet's interest and concern was national progress and salvation. Any other course of action could only lead to the subversion of both the individual and the state. This the purport of those lines in which King Arthur accuses his knights of following "wandering fires."

"Some among you held that if the King
 Hath seen the sight he would have sworn the vow;
 Not easily, seeing that the King must guard
 That which he rules, and is but as the hind
 To whom a space of land is given to plow.
 Who may not wander from the allotted field
 Before his work be done; but being done,
 Let visions of the night, or of the day
 Come as they will; and many a time they come,
 Until this earth he walks on seems not earth." 12

TENNYSON'S A truly great poet cannot circumscribe himself
 NARROW
 NATIONALISM with national prejudices, but must allow his inter-
 ests to be extended to all nations and peoples; not
 so for Tennyson, his interests, both in his writings and in his
 daily life, was a very selfish nationalism. It has already been
 pointed out how Tennyson looked only for a materialistic reli-
 gion that would aid national prosperity. On account of this nar-
 row outlook the poet never became international-minded; unlike
 Browning and many other poets of his day, he could not write
 of Italy, of Spain, of France, of the lives of men and women
 who dwelt in other lands, he had little sympathy with other
 nations. 13 The Ode To The Death of The Duke of Wellington is
 a call to the nation's statesmen to

"Keep our noble England whole,
 And save the one true seed of freedom sown." 14

One could scarcely think of Tennyson as living anywhere save in
 England, as he was English to the very core. This nationalistic
 spirit proclaims itself in the epilogue to the "Idylls" where
 the poet heralds and announces the imperial mission of Eng-
 land's rulers.

"The loyal to her crown,
Are loyal to their own fair sons, who love
Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes
For ever-broadening England, and her throne
In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle
That knows not her own greatness." 15

THE TALE AND THE CHARACTERS
IN THE "IDYLLS" ARE TOO MODERN

It is only natural that Tennyson, who did not comprehend the life and spirit of the Middle Ages, and who was totally unsympathetic towards the Middle Ages, should modernize the tale and its characters. We feel in the "Idylls" the Victorian liberal movements in philosophy and religion; the characters are placed at Camelot but they express the thoughts of the nineteenth century London, Cambridge, or the English countryside. The "Idylls" are filled with modern touches:

"King Arthur like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port; and all the people cried.
'Arthur is come again, he cannot die.'
Then those that stood upon the hills behind
Repeated - 'Come again, and thrice as fair';
And further inland, voices echoed - 'Come
With all good things, and war shall be no more.' " 16

That the "Idylls" represent no real world and that the men and women of the tale want life is certain, for Tennyson has modernized too much; in his efforts the poet has removed his characters from reality and set up types. 17 Tennyson's Arthur is too ideal, i.e. The Arthur of the "Idylls" is by no means the Arthur of the old Welsh and Celtic legends. 18 The other characters, Guinevere, Percival, Galahad, Merlin, Tristram and even Lancelot, who is the most living person in the "Idylls,"

are like those photographs or composite-pictures made by placing a series of faces one on top of the other; such a process may give us a general and modern type picture, but it does not represent real individuals.

THE ALLEGORY
IS A FAILURE,
UNNECESSARY
AND CONFUSING

Tennyson not only modernized the story, but he also put into it an allegory, which includes all of his bias against medieval times and medieval asceticism. It is this allegory that has ruined an otherwise outstanding poem because it necessitated the manifold changes that Tennyson put into the legend. The allegory is unnecessary and causes confusion in the story. The allegory of the "Idylls" and the poet's purpose in writing the "Idylls" are expressed in these lines.

"Accept this old imperfect tale,
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul
Rather than that gray king whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still; or him
Of Geoffrey's book, or him of Malleor's, one
Touched by the adulterous finger of a time
That hovered between war and wantoness,
And crowning and dethronements." 19

"Sense at war with Soul." In these few words we have Tennyson's conviction that because of the quest the sensual part of man would dominate and overthrow the soul. Malory in his "Morte D'Arthur" also pictured sense at war with soul, but to Malory's mind the ascetic quest always resulted in the victory of the soul of man over his lower sensual nature. Tennyson's allegory was fully launched in the poem, "The Coming of Arthur," and

those tales that followed were fitted to the allegory. Some of the poems of the "Idylls" had been written before the "Coming of Arthur," These had to be modified according to the allegory. The allegory of the "Idylls of the King" represents King Arthur as the rational soul, coming mysteriously from heaven and washed into Merlin's arms by a great wave. Merlin, who educates King Arthur, is intellectual and magical power; Guinevere is the heart; the knights of the Round Table are the nobler faculties in man from which the Soul(Arthur) builds around itself a knighthood to do its reforming will. Arthur's kingship meets opposition in the brutal and sensual powers of human nature. 20

The allegory and modern conceptions which Tennyson implanted into the old legend forced him to have recourse to inventions. (These inventions will be dealt with at greater length in the following chapter.) In the "Idylls" the allegory and the story do not fit, they clash throughout, for an allegory should have a story invented for its purpose. Sometimes the men and women characters of the "Idylls" are real, sometimes they are mere shadows; sometimes the events are human and romantic, then again they are allegorical in romantic dress. Tennyson's allegory and story cannot be united; in fact, his allegory might have been left out altogether. All the lessons contained in the "Idylls" are far more effectively pictured in the acts of the men and women of the story. The repentance of Guinevere, the forgiveness of Arthur are far more impressive

and far simpler in their lesson to us, when we see Arthur as Arthur, and Guinevere as Guinevere, than Arthur as the rational soul and Guinevere as the human heart.

"No one a hundred years hence, will care a straw about the allegory; but men will, always care for the story, and how the poet has made the persons in it set forth their human nature on the stage of life. The humanity, not the metaphysics, is the interesting thing, and Malory's book, though Tennyson decries its morality, is more human, more moral, than the Idylls of the King. Even the far off mythic Arthur is more at home with us than the Arthur of the Idylls, whenever we are forced to consider him as the rational soul." 21

Malory has no such allegory as Tennyson's in his "~~Morte D~~Arthur," he only tried to give us a tale of men and women, a tale which he compiled from many sources. Malory's allegory and story tended to show the beauty and attractiveness of the Catholic knight of medieval times in the quest for personal sanctification.

THE "IDYLLS" Tennyson endeavored to unite the "Idylls of
FAIL
AS AN EPIC the King" into a single framework. Two poems of the "Idylls," namely, "The Coming of Arthur" as the first poem, and the "Passing of Arthur" as the closing poem, served to unify the "Idylls" into an epic, an epic which had the ideal King Arthur as its hero. The "idea of its becoming an epic was originally in his mind and influenced his later work upon the whole poem." 22 In carrying out his epic design Tennyson neglected the canons which are necessary for a great epic. An epic must have a clear moral victory, that is, the hero must ultimately

triumph over the attacks of fate and time. The hero may be all but vanquished, yet his soul remains unconquered. This moral victory was the position of Achilles, of Aeneas, of Dante. Such a moral victory is not the position of King Arthur in the final lines of the "Idylls." Arthur's kingdom and his life work, Tennyson thinks, will "reel back into the beast." ²³ This is not the true exit of an epic hero, "the epic hero must have a clear moral victory and be purified into clearness, and this is not the case with Arthur." ²⁴

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6. Sommers, H.O., Morte D'Arthur, vol. 3
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9. Tennyson, Alfred, Dedication of the "Idylls of the King" line 7
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12. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Holy Grail, line 899
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16. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Morte D'Arthur, line 345
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CHAPTER FOUR

A COMPARISON OF THE "IDYLLS" AND MALORY'S "MORTE D'ARTHUR"

The previous chapters have shown how Tennyson and Malory were representative of the religious and philosophic beliefs of their age. Since the spirit of the Victorian era was a far cry from that of the Middle Ages and Malory's time, many changes and inventions are to be looked for in Tennyson's version of the Arthurian legend. The old legend was only a story intended to furnish the medieval Christian with a suitable form of literature that would fill the mind of the reader with the high ideals of Christianity. There was no such allegory as Tennyson's to be found in the legend; it was merely the tale of the adventures of men and women struggling with the temptations and trials of this life on their quest for eternal happiness.

Comparing the "Idylls" with Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" we are reminded of those Catholic books of devotion adapted for members of the Church of England, in which all that savors too much of Catholicity is left out. There is no doubt a strong Protestant prejudice in Tennyson, struggling with his sense of artistic beauty, and Protestantism repeatedly wins the day. In the "Idylls" we find that the many innovations and changes have their origin in Tennyson's inability to comprehend the Middle Ages and the Catholic element which is an essential part of the legend and of Malory's story. The principal points of departure between the "Idylls" and its predecessor the "Morte D'Arthur"

will be taken up in this chapter, in order to give concrete proof of the failure of the "Idylls" and the reason for the failure. This study will deal with the following points; the aim of Tennyson and Malory in writing their respective works; the treatment of the Fall of the Round Table in both Malory's and Tennyson's work; the treatment of the various characters in the "Morte D'Arthur" and in the "Idylls of the King," viz., King Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere, Sir Galahad, Perceval's sister, King Pellam, Tristram, Merlin, Pelleas and Ettarre.

THE AIM OF THE "IDYLLS" AND THE "MORTE D'ARTHUR"

Here in his own words we have the aim and purpose of Tennyson's most comprehensive life study.

"My meaning in the Idylls of the King is spiritual, Arthur was allegorical to me. I intended to represent him as the ideal of the soul of man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh. The whole is a dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. . . . It is not the history of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle of generations."

Malory's aim and purpose was entirely at variance with the aim and purpose of Tennyson. Malory compiled his work that he might present to his readers the brave and chivalrous deeds of the Catholic knight so popular in medieval tradition. As has already been pointed out the knights were penitents seeking their personal sanctification in the search after the Grail.

TENNYSON BASED HIS IN- NOVATIONS AROUND THE HOLY GRAIL

In Tennyson's day alongside the growth of unbelief, there had been another movement back to the ascetic ideals of the early Church. This

movement existed within the Established Church, and is now known as the Oxford Movement. Tennyson wished to combat this renaissance which was leading towards the ascetic ideal of the Catholic Church. In this light we must consider his poem "The Holy Grail" and its allegory, for it sets before us Tennyson's assumption that asceticism has evil consequences. The poet links the quest for the Grail with the foolish superstitions and sensual debasements that, in his mind, are closely associated with the ascetic ideal of Catholicism. The poem "The Holy Grail" starts with the inspiration of a nun, the result of her ascetical dreams, and continues to the conclusion, which must follow, namely, an insane spasm of superstition that invaded the Round Table. The knights forsook their daily duty out of love for a dreamy sublimated religion. Nothing remains after the quest but disillusionment and a crippled order. "Tennyson deliberately sets himself to make an allegory, the meaning of which shall be - that ascetic religion, the exciting pursuit of signs and wonders, the severance from home and the common love of man and woman, and a retreat from the daily works of the world into cloistered seclusion, or in pursuit of supernatural spiritualism are, save for a few exceptional characters, entirely evil." 2

The specific changes which Tennyson introduced into the "Idylls" because of his views on asceticism and the quest for the Holy Grail are the following: King Arthur in Tennyson's

poem is too perfect a character; Perceval's sister, in Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" a gentlewoman who sends Galahad forth on the quest, becomes in the "Idylls" a religious. Tennyson pictures her as a dreamy nun who sends forth the knights on a hopeless quest; Tennyson in the "Idylls" presents King Pellam and Garlon as outstanding examples of sensualism, and interprets this sensualism as the result of the ascetic quest; Innovations are also to be found in the doom of Merlin, in the character presentation of Pelleas and Ettarre, Tristram and Isolt, Sir Galahad, and the account of the Fall of the Round Table. Each of these changes and innovations which Tennyson introduced into the "Idylls" will be dealt with at greater length in the following pages.

KING ARTHUR IN THE
"IDYLLS" AND IN THE
"MORTE D'ARTHUR"

In order to idealize and thereby modernize his hero Tennyson thoroughly removed all stains from Malory's Arthur. The Vic-

torian poet permits many versions of Arthur's birth so that the hero of the "Idylls" would seem to have a more mysterious origin, and thus the more easily would Arthur, as the human soul, fit in with the allegory. But Malory in his "Morte D'Arthur" is quite definite about Arthur's birth; Uther Pendragon begets Arthur from Igrayne, the wife of the Duke of Cornwall, and only marries her after the Duke's death.

In the "Idylls" we have before us a perfect, an ideal Arthur, a climax of spiritual evolution, the flawless man,

"there was no such perfect man since Adam." 4

"Four great zones of sculture, set betwixt
 With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:
 And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
 And in the second men are slaying beasts,
 And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
 And on the fourth are men with growing wings,
 And over all one statue in the mould
 Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown,
 And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star." 5

This perfect Arthur is far from the old traditional Arthur. King Arthur of the "Idylls" has an excess of virtue, he could feel no consciousness of sin, and he could not understand human nature and its tendency to fall. This is a serious defect in the character of King Arthur and is to be regretted. Arthur's forgiveness of Guinevere lacks the natural element, he stands aloof and considers the sin of Guinevere not so much against his person as against the ideal and perfect order which he had established. 6 In Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" sin is looked upon as a crime, not against an ideal order as in the "Idylls of the King," but as a crime against God, an offense against Divine Justice, worthy of Divine retribution here or hereafter.

Malory's Arthur was not an ideal but a human personage. The story of his birth is that of an illicit union. Again there is the story of Arthur begetting a child by his sister, the child who later will be the cause of Arthur's downfall. Thus we see that Arthur's sin brings on his own destruction.

"Ye have done a thyng that God is displeasyd with yow/ for ye have layne by your syster/ and on her ye have goten a child that shalle destroye yow and all the knyghtes of your realme." 7

In Malory's story we also read of Arthur's ruthless massacre of children in order to kill his son Modred, so as to escape the consequences of his guilt. 8

PERCEVAL'S SISTER In Perceval's sister we have a perfect instance of

how the poet freely changed the characters of the legend for his purpose. To further insist upon his dislike for all ascetical religion Tennyson presents Perceval's sister, not as a gentlewoman as she is in the story of Malory, but as a nun who with her mystic dreams causes the knights to go forth on their quest for wandering phantoms, and ultimately to their ruin and the ruin of the Round Table.

"Ah, Galahad, Galahad," said the King, "for such
As thou art is the vision, not for these.
Thy holy nun and thou have seen a sign-
Holier is none, my Percival, than she-
A sign to maim this Order which I made." 9

There is only one meaning to be drawn from these lines, that the dreams of a pious nun have contributed to the ruin of Arthur's kingdom. In Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" we see Perceval's sister not as a nun but as a gentlewoman. In the mystic search for the Grail this gentlewoman not only sends the knights forth in search of the Grail but also takes an active part in the quest. She is the only woman who is constantly at the side of the knights in their search for the SancGraal.

"Thenne the good man awaked Galahad/ and badde hym
aryse and speke with a gentywoman that semeth hath
grete nede of yow/ Thenne Galahad wente to her & asked
her what she wold/ Galahad sayd she I will that ye arme
ye and monte upon your hors and folowe me/ for I shall
shewe yow within these thre dayes the hyest adventure

that ever ony knyght sawe/ Anone Galahad armed hym and took his hors and commaunded hym to God/ and badde the gentilwoman go and he wol folowe there as she lyked." 10

Perceval's sister leads Galahad out upon the quest, and in the greater part of the seventeenth book of the "Morte D'Arthur" we see her taking part in the Grail search. Just before Galahad sees the vision of the Holy Grail she dies a holy death. In Malory's story it is not any search after "wandering fires" that we witness, for Perceval's sister has sent the knights forth in search of the Holy Grail of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

KING PELLAM IN Tennyson's presentation of King Pellam is THE "IDYLLS" AND one of the most revolting in the "Idylls." IN THE "MORTE D'ARTHUR" In

King Pellam we have a perfect instance of the poet's dislike for Catholic asceticism; it is a picture of religion corrupted by asceticism. 11 King Pellam is not the noblest character in Malory's work, still he is an earnest ruler, who fails not because of any hypocrisy but on account of human weakness. In Tennyson's story King Pellam holds one of the tributary courts of Arthur's realm. He is a hypocritical king, who, out of jealousy of Arthur's sanctity, betakes himself to pious practices and devotions:

"And finds himself descended from the Saint
Arimathean Joseph

.

He boasts his life as purer than thy own;
Eats scarce enough to keep his pulse abeat;
Hath pushed aside his faithful wife, nor lets
Or dame or damsel enter at his gates
Lest he should be polluted." 12

While King Pellam of the "Idylls" is feigning piety and collecting sacred relics, his son and heir, Garlon, is a **secret** libertine and murderer, who lives his vicious life under the protection of his father. Balin, a guest at King Pellam's palace, slays the evil Garlon; and then the hypocritical Pellam sends his men in revengeful pursuit of Balin.

In the "Morte D'Arthur" we see Garlon, not as the son of King Pellam, but as his brother. Garlon^{the} invincible knight had committed many wrongs and always with impunity. Balin, after Garlon had slain two of his fellow knights, went to King Pellam's palace to seek revenge by the death of Garlon. Garlon, upon insulting Balin at table, was killed by Balin. Thereupon Pellam and his knights pursued Balin throughout the castle. Balin, being weaponless and pursued from room to room, finds himself in a chamber full of the relics of Joseph of Arimathea. There he seizes a spear, the very spear with which the Roman soldier pierced the side of Christ, and wounds King Pellam. The castle falls in ruins because of that dolorous stroke with the sacred spear, and King Pellam's wound can only be healed by Galahad after he had achieved the quest.

"And whan Balyn sawe that spere/ he gat it in his hand and tordned hym to King Pellam and smote hym passyngly sore with that spere that King Pellam felle doune in a swoune/ and therwith the castel rooffe and wallys brake and fylle to the erthe/ and Balyn felle doune so that he myghte not sterve foote nor hand/ And so the moost parte of the castel that was falle doune through that dolorous stroke laye upon Pellam and Balyn thre dayes/ 13

"Thenne Merlyn cam thyder and toke up Balyn and gat

hym a good hors for his was dede/ and bade hym ryde oute of that countrey/ I wold have my damoyssel sayd Balyn/ Loo sayd Merlyn where she lyeth Dede & Kynge Pellam lay so many yeres so wounded/ and myght never be hole tyl Galahad/ the haute prince heled hym in the quest of the Sangraille/ And that was the same spere that Longeus smote our Lorde to the herte/ and Kynge Pellam was nyghe of Joseph kynne/ and that was the moost worshipful man that lyved in those dayes/ and grete pyte it was of his hurte/ for thorow that stroke torned to grete dole thray and tene." 14

From these brief quotations it is evident that the author of the "Idylls" changed the character of King Pellam almost completely. In the "Morte D'Arthur" King Pellam, despite his holy ancestry, helped to bring about his own downfall, but like all good Christian knights he patiently suffered in expiation of his guilt until Galahad successfully terminated the Grail quest.

THE DOOM OF MERLIN
IN THE "IDYLLS" AND
IN THE "MORTE D'ARTHUR"

In the poem "Merlin and Vivien" Tennyson continues his allegory on the

causes of the destruction of King Arthur's noble realm. Merlin is the intellect, the wizened old sage, who guards the spiritual kingdom of Arthur. Vivian, the tool of the jealous Cornish King Mark, has already caused the deaths of the brothers Balin and Balan. Now she is treacherously spreading her snares for the knights of the Round Table, and even tries to tempt the blameless King himself. Vivien balked in her designs at court, withdraws and sets herself to ensnare Merlin.

"And after that she sets herself to gain
Him, the most famous man of all those times." 15

The spawn of sensuality which has been born by the ascetical quest will gain another victim by the doom of Merlin. 16

"Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy;
He walked with dreams and darkness, and he found
A doom that ever poised itself to fall,
An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
World-war of dying flesh against the life,
Death in all life, and lying in all love,
The meanest having power upon the highest
And the high purpose broken by the worm." 17

Vivien follows Merlin in his black mood to learn from him the deadly charm whereby it is possible to put one into a death-like sleep. This sleep can only be removed by one who knows the secret of the charm. Vivien employs all her wiles and sensuous beauty to stir up Merlin's passions. She cajoles, is petulant, pretends injured innocence and finally wrests the secret from him.

"For Merlin, overtalked and overworn,
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.
Then in a moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame." 18

The vigor and strength of Arthur's kingdom having been sapped by the ascetic quest, Vivien is finally able to extinguish the light of wisdom in the soul, and with Merlin's fall accomplishes the ruin of the Round Table and its knights.

This is an unnatural and disagreeable tale, as are all stories concerning an old man allured to his ruin by a young designing woman. The story is also to be found in Malory's work but it is not so revolting. In the earlier tale of Malory Merlin causes his own ruin. The young lady is one of the Ladies

of the Lake, who, unwillingly pursued by Merlin, remains pure throughout. The story in the "Morte D'Arthur" runs as follows: Merlin falls into a dotage; love for the young lady turns the old magician into a fool; and the Lady of the Lake (Nimue, not Vivien) herself quite pure, but weary to death of him, works the spell upon Merlin and buries him under a rock.

"It felle so that Merlyn felle in a dottage on the damoysel that kyng Pellinore broughten to the Courte/ and she was one of the damoysels of the lake that hyzte Nyneue/ But Merlyn wold lete haue her no rest but alweyes he wold be with her And alweyes Merlyn lay aboute the lady to have her maydenhode/ and she was ever passynge wery of hym/ and fayne wold have been de-lyverd of hym/ for she was aferd of hym bycause he was a devyls sone/ And so on a tyme it happed that Merlyn shewed to her in a rocke where as was a grete wonder/ and wroughte by enchauntment that wente under a grete stone/ So by her subtile wyrchyng she made Merlyn to go under that stone to lete her wete of the merveilles there/ but she wroughte so ther for hym that he came never oute for alle the crafte he coude do/ And so she departed and lefte Merlyn." 19

Malory put no allegory into the tale, Merlin grows old and brings about his own destruction. The ending is a bit mysterious but quite different from that of Tennyson. 20 The young Lady of the Lake desires no harm to come to Arthur nor to his knights, she cares only to rid herself of the foolish old man, and thus to preserve her purity.

PELLEAS Pelleas in the "Idylls of the King" is one of the
AND
ETTARRE young knights who fill the gaps made in the fellowship of the Round Table by the mischances of the quest. Tennyson took this tale from Malory's work but wrote it afresh to suit his ever present allegory. Tennyson wanted this tale to

aid his purpose in portraying a sensuous society which precedes the downfall of a nation, especially after a religious revival based on an ascetic ideal. ²¹ Here again we see the story of the "Idylls" suffering because of the allegory.

MALORY'S TALE Pelleas, a king of the Isles, loves the beautiful Ettarre, and for her sake wins as victor in a tournament of arms the prize of the golden circlet. Ettarre hates and despises him and causes her felon knights to bind, insult and drive Pelleas from her castle. Sir Gawain promises to win the love of Ettarre for Pelleas, and for this purpose he borrows Sir Pelleas' arms and horse. But in place of turning Ettarre's heart towards Pelleas, Gawain becomes her lover. Sir Pelleas finally detects Gawain's treachery and coming upon the lovers asleep, lays his naked sword upon their throats and departs. This Pelleas did as a sign that he has discovered the treachery and could have slain them, had he so wished. Sir Pelleas then rides home to die of a broken heart. At this juncture Nimue, The Lady of the Lake, comes on the scene. She restores Pelleas to health and sanity, replaces his love of Ettarre with love for herself. To avenge Sir Pelleas on Ettarre the Lady of the Lake bewitches Ettarre into a hopeless love for Pelleas, a love as great as her former hatred. Ettarre drawn to his bedside, besought the affection she had formerly rejected. Pelleas cries out, "Begone traitress!" and Ettarre dies of a broken heart, and Pelleas weds the Lady

of the Lake. 22

TENNYSON'S Tennyson's tale is much the same but he could
VERSION OF
THE TALE not allow Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, to do anything benevolent. Pelleas must also be a victim of exaggerated asceticism as the following account will show. Tennyson substitutes Vivien for Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, in order that Vivien might continue her evil work. The poem "Pelleas and Ettarre" closes with a repetition of the same effect as in the case of Balin. Sir Pelleas is driven desperate by the treachery of Gawain, and the reported infidelity of Queen guinevere, and the general corruption of King Arthur's knighthood.

"No name, no name," he shouted; "A scourge am I
To lash the treasons of the Table Round."
"Yea but thy name?" "I have many names," he cried,
"I am wrath and shame and hate and evil fame,
And like a poisonous wind I pass to blast
And blaze the crime of Lancelot and the Queen." 23

Pelleas after uttering these words disappears into the darkness, with the fury of a madman. Now a shadow falls upon the Round Table, and Modred, the traitor, sees that his hour is at hand. In Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" the tale of Pelleas and Ettarre has little in common with the rest of the legend save that it reveals the treachery of Gawain, brother of the traitor Modred. It is linked with no moral lesson nor allegory, as it is in the "Idylls." Andrew Lang thinks that Tennyson's mingling of his modern allegory with the medieval tale has considerably enfeebled the whole poem, "Pelleas and Ettarre." 24

TRISTRAM
AND

ISOLT "Idylls" is his presentation of Tristram's love for Isolt; the traditional romance has been transformed into a common intrigue. Now that the court life has been vitiated because of Lancelot' and Guinevere's sin, many of the knights are openly advocating free love and Tristram is the most outspoken. Lancelot and Guinevere were the first to break the bond of purity, then follows the sin of Tristram and Isolt. Arthur speaks;

"The others, following these my mightiest knights
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinned also." 25

In Tennyson's version of the Tristram tale there is no need for the love potion of Malory's story to cause Isolt and Tristram to sin; their sin is the debased sensualism which together with the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere and many others has resulted from the ascetic quest of the Holy Grail. Tristram openly proclaims the doctrine of lust.

"Free love- free field- we love but while we may;
The woods are hushed, their music is no more;
The leaf is dead, the yearning past away:
New leaf, new life, the days of frost are o'er;
New life, new love, to suit the newer day:
New loves are sweet as those that went before;
Free love- free field- we love but while we may." 26

In the "Morte D'Arthur" Tristram plays a more noble role, he is a chivalrous knight fighting for the knightly ideals of his day and for his lovely lady Isolt. Tristram had been dispatched to Ireland to seek the hand of Isolt for King Mark.

On the return voyage Tristram and Isolt accidentally drink a love potion which had been intended for Isolt's and King Mark's wedding day. This love potion carried with it the power to make Mark and Isolt mutually faithful throughout their lives. ²⁷

This is how the romance began and explains the reason why the couple unknowingly fell in love. Tristram in the same chapter of the "Morte D'Arthur," because of his promise to King Mark, has already refused Isolt's hand in marriage, which had been offered by her father. After the fatal drink the great romance begins but there is none of the open lewdness in the tale that there is in the "Idylls." In the "Idylls" Tristram and Isolt have been vulgarized, all the romance has been taken out of them, and they are reduced to the level of sensual beasts.

"Moreover this piece about Tristram and Isolt was quite unnecessary. The story told of them may, as I said, enhance by a fresh example the ethical aim of the first part; but it is weaker than the first part, and the lesson is as strong without it." ²⁸

SIR GALAHAD OF TENNYSON'S AND MALORY'S WORK Sir Galahad of the "Idylls" does not differ very much from the Galahad of Malory's tale.

There are a few slight changes, which can be traced to Tennyson's allegory against asceticism. It will be recalled that Tennyson's allegory more than implies that an ascetical quest usually results in moral delinquency and those who take part in such a quest, although they begin with high ascetical motives, usually fall into sins of sensual indulgence. After making this general condemnation of asceticism Tennyson presents Sir

Galahad, as the perfect knight, who alone may fully accomplish the quest. Here Tennyson remains faithful to the traditional tale but contradicts his own allegory. If Lancelot and the others in seeking after the Grail were themselves the victims of the evils they set out to conquer, why not Sir Galahad also? Is he the exceptional soul or does Tennyson fail to consistently follow out the moral implications of the allegory? However we choose to answer the question, it remains that Tennyson in working out the difficulty fashioned a Sir Galahad who lacks the sinews, the manly flesh and blood of Malory's conception. Tennyson's idea of Galahad is too artificial, it is that of a man who has already attained perfection. So perfect and highly spiritualized is Tennyson's conception of Galahad that he appears in the "Idylls" as almost dehumanized, an angel and no man, at least not a man subject to temptations of the devil, the flesh and the world. Tennyson's idea of Galahad is too highly idealized, so spiritualized that the poet hesitates to associate his name with "the thought to sin allied." So highly idealized a conception of Sir Galahad could not admit the possibility of illegitimate birth, therefore Tennyson obscures the fact, faithfully told by Malory,²⁹ that Lancelot through an illegitimate union begot Galahad. Tennyson could not admit of such parenthood, for this would link the sinful Lancelot with the pure knight Galahad. Such a kinship would mar the flawless perfection of his great hero. He does not deny their kinship outright, neither does he give it serious consideration.

Tennyson summarily dismisses the suggestion of Lancelot's parenthood.

"Sister or brother none had he; but some
 Called him a son of Lancelot, and some said
 Begotten by enchantment - chatterers they,
 Like birds of passage piping up and down,
 That gape for flies - we know ~~not~~ whence they come!
 For when was Lancelot wanderingly lewd?" 30

THE FALL OF THE ROUND TABLE Malory and Tennyson explained the cause of the Fall of the Round Table differently, as both writers had different purposes in mind when writing their works. To the Victorian poet King Arthur's knighthood was doomed because of the false religious quest, and because of the sensualism that in Tennyson's opinion naturally resulted from an ascetical quest. Malory made the downfall of the Round Table and the death of King Arthur follow from the great wrong which the king himself committed. Modred, the traitor, is represented as the son of Bellicent, whom Arthur has loved and betrayed in his youth, not knowing that she was his own half-sister.

"Ye have done a thyng late that God is displeasyd
 with yow/ for ye have layne by your syster/ and on her
 ye have goten a chylde/ that shalle deströye yow and all
 the knyghtes of your realme." 31

King Arthur verifies his kinship with Bellicent, and dreading Merlin's prophecy duplicates the biblical massacre of Herod, so as to kill Modred and avoid the consequences of his guilt.³² Modred chanced to escape the killing of so many young children, and grows to knighthood in Arthur's court, and eventually

destroys the realm.

Tennyson has entirely eliminated this part of Malory's tale. He makes the king say of Modred:

"I must strike against the man they call
My sister's son - no kin of mine." 33

The Victorian poet traces the ruin of the Round Table to other causes: the asceticism of the quest, the transgression of Lancelot and Guinevere and the others, the corruption of the court through the evil influence of Vivien, and the perversion of King Arthur's ideals among his followers. In the fall of the Round Table we see what lesson Tennyson hopes to drive home by his allegory, that man's principal duty is to the state; that when a state fails to accomplish its purpose which is both spiritual and political, it is not because of some external attack or misfortune, but on account of moral evil that overthrows the very foundations of the state. 34 Ordinarily we would agree with such an opinion, but by moral evil Tennyson means the individual ascetic quest for eternal salvation heedless of all material anxieties. In the poem the "Last Tournament" we see how the rules of the tournament are violated without a word of protest. This violation of the laws with impunity, according to Tennyson's mind, is to be traced to ascetic sensualism and proclaims the real destruction and decay of the Round Table. For a lawless realm is a broken realm. 35

THE "IDYLLS" Why the allegory of the "Idylls" fails to unify
END IN DEFEAT the poem into an epic has already been explained.

The "Idylls of the King" do not close in victory, for we see Tennyson's hero Arthur depart from this life shrouded with doubt and trouble. In the "Passing of Arthur" we hear King Arthur speak:

"I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, but now I pass and die.
O me! For why is all around us here
As if some lesser God had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it and make it beautiful?

For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
And have but stricken with the sword in vain;
And all whereon I leaned in wife and friend
Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
Reels back into the beast, and is no more.
My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death." 36

From these few lines it is evident that the "Idylls" end on a note of doubt and despair; Arthur is unable to affirm or deny anything. There is no clear belief, no triumph of the soul; and the last battle in the West is fought in a foggy death-white mist. Such was Tennyson's allegory that all ascetical seeking for personal sanctification only leads to anarchy, despair and ruin.

THE "MORTE D'ARTHUR"
ENDS IN ATONEMENT &
SPIRITUAL VICTORY

Malory's work closes with a spiritual victory and hope for the future life. We read of Queen Guinevere entering the convent at Almsbury only after King Arthur's death. Tennyson has Guinevere entering the convent while the king is still alive. Lancelot departs after Arthur's burial and also decides to end his days in religion.

The bishop of Canterbury places the habit upon Lancelot and after a time ordains him.. 37 Seven other knights joined Lancelot in his fastings and austerities. Not long after Guinevere's death in the cloister, Lancelot lay dying. He begged the bishop to grant him all the rights due to a dying Catholic.

"And so after mydnyght ayenst day the byshop then was hermyte as he laye in his bedd a slepe he fyl upon a grete laughter/ And therewyth al the felyshyp awoke and came to the byshop and asked hym what he eyled/ A Jshu mercy sayd the byshop why dyd ye awake me I was nevere in al my lyf so mery & so wel at ease/ wherefore sayd Syr Bors/ Truly sayd the byshop here was syr Launcelot with me with mo angellis than ever I sawe men in one day/ & I sawe the angellys hevere up Syr Launcelot unto heven & the yates of heven opened ayenst hym/ So whan syr Bors & his felowes come to his(sc. Lancelot's) bedde they founde hym starke dede/ & he laye as he had smyled & sweetest savor aboute hym that ever they felte." 38

And so we see how Lancelot dies a holy death. He has achieved his quest and will now enjoy the fuller and complete vision of the Sancgraal; that vision of the Grail which was denied him in this life of penance. "The Morte D'Arthur" closes with this note of spiritual joy and triumphal victory. An earthly kingdom has perished, but its loss is repaid a hundredfold by the eternal kingdom. This eternal kingdom meant little or nothing to Tennyson and his materialistic age, which sought only national prosperity.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. Tennyson, Hallam, op. cit., introduction, p. xl.
2. Brooke, Stopford, op. cit., p. 323
3. Malory, Sir Thomas, Morte D'Arthur, book I, chap. 2
4. Tennyson, Hallam, op. cit., p. 162
5. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Holy Grail, line 232
6. Van Dyke, Henry, op. cit., p. 192
7. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book I, chap. 20
8. ibid., book I, chap. 28
9. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Holy Grail, line 293
10. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book xvii, chap. 1
11. Pallen, Conde, op. cit., p. 111
12. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Balin and Balan, line 98
13. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book ii, chap. 15
14. ibid., book ii, chap. 16
15. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Merlin and Vivien, line 163
16. Pallen, Conde, op. cit., p. 73
17. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Merlin and Vivien, line 187
18. ibid., line 963
19. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book iv, chap. 1
20. Brooke, Stopford, op. cit., p. 306
21. ibid., page 337
22. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book iv, chap. 22-24 inclu.
23. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Pelleas and Ettarre, line 552

24. Lang, Andrew, op. cit., p. 149
25. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Guinevere, line 486
26. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Last Tournament, line 275
27. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book viii, chap. 24
28. Brooke, Stopford, op. cit., p. 347
29. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book xvii, chap. 23
30. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Holy Grail, line 143
31. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book i, chap. 20
32. ibid., book ii, chap. 1
33. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem Guinevere, line 569
34. Tennyson, Hallam, op. cit., p. 401
35. Gordon, Wm. C., op. cit., p. 145
36. Tennyson, Alfred, Poem The Passing of Arthur, line 8
37. Malory, Sir Thomas, op. cit., book xxi, chapters 10 & ff.
38. ibid., book xxi, chap. 12

CONCLUSION

"The Idylls of the King," while they are based on Malory's "Morte D'Arthur," have lost the Catholic spirit of Malory's work and of the legendary Arthurian story. The first chapter of this thesis showed how Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" kept the Catholic spirit of the tale. Malory in presenting his knights, who were in search of the Grail, portrayed for us the medieval Christian seeking personal sanctification by the ascetic path of penance. Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" is an accurate representation of medieval Catholic asceticism.

Just as Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" was influenced by the Catholic spirit of his age, so also was Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" influenced by the Victorian age. The "Idylls" are filled with the religious and philosophic spirit of nineteenth century England, an era of religious doubt, and of scientific evolution and materialism.

That Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" are a failure is mainly due to the fact that the poet disliked asceticism and because he inserted an allegory against asceticism into his "Idylls." This allegory was that all asceticism could only lead to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. Such a allegory is contrary to the legendary Arthurian story.

The principal changes and innovations which Tennyson introduced into the "Idylls" in order that he might fit his modern allegory to the Arthurian story are set forth in the last

chapter, and a comparison is made with Malory's treatment of the same characters and incidents. Tennyson's King Arthur is too perfect, he is an ideal Arthur. The poet has removed all stains of human weakness from his hero. The Arthur of Malory's story was not an ideal but a human personage, who brought about his own downfall by his sin. Sir Galahad of the "Idylls of the King" is too highly spiritualized, so much so that Tennyson contradicts his allegory when he allows Sir Galahad to alone survive the ascetic quest. According to Tennyson Lancelot and Guinevere of the "Idylls" are the principal causes why asceticism degenerated into base sensualism. Malory also admits their illicit love but his story shows how Lancelot and Guinevere overcame their sinful passion and die holy deaths precisely on account of the ascetic quest. Tennyson pictures for us a pious hypocrite in the character of King Pellam, whereas Malory shows King Pellam as a Christian king who admits his sin and does penance. The traditional tale as told by Malory represents Tristram and Isolt as lovers whose love is due to a love-potion unknowingly taken. Tennyson omitted this love-potion episode and explains their illicit love as another instance of debased asceticism. These are the more important changes in the "Idylls" which can be traced to Tennyson's allegory against asceticism.

If Tennyson had only grasped the spirit of the medieval Arthurian legend and presented the ascetic ideal in his "Idylls of the King," his poems on King Arthur would have stood out

prominently in the field of Arthurian literature. But like most Protestant writers of his day Tennyson could not rise above the Protestant prejudices of his age, he was shackled by the narrow Victorian outlook of the late nineteenth century. Would that the author of the "Idylls" had risen to the heights which the Catholic legend of King Arthur demanded! We would have had the most beautiful story ever written on the legend of King Arthur.

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